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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [FJ](#) [NZ](#)
SUBJECT: NEW ZEALAND HIGH COMMISSIONER PNG-ED - FIJI
REACTION

REF: SUVA 313

Summary

1. (SBU) In a statement issued late June 14, Fiji's Office of the Prime Minister defended the interim government's (IG) decision to declare Michael Green, New Zealand's High Commissioner to Fiji, "persona non grata." The statement claimed Green had interfered in Fiji's domestic affairs, but gave few specifics. The statement said that Fiji-New Zealand relations have been strained since the December military takeover, that Fiji's representative in Wellington had been "snubbed" by NZ authorities, and that Green's "attitude" had not helped the situation. The PM's office insisted that the decision should not impact Fiji's relations with other countries. Initial reaction from non IG-sources in Fiji has been strongly negative. Leading Fiji human rights activist Shamima Ali said the action shows that the interim regime will not tolerate dissenting views from any quarter, even from diplomats. She and others urged the regime to reconsider. End summary.

PM's Office Defends PNG Decision

2. (U) Several hours after the government of New Zealand announced that New Zealand High Commissioner to Fiji Michael Green had been declared "persona non grata" by Fiji's interim government (IG), Fiji's Office of the Prime Minister issued a statement defending the decision. The statement reads: "It is with deep regret and reluctance that the Government of the Republic of Fiji Islands have come to the decision to issue Persona Non-Grata to H.E. Michael Green. The practice of quiet diplomacy was foremost (sic) given all the chances to prevail by Fiji authorities in our efforts to seek understanding of H.E. Mr. Green to stop interfering in Fiji's domestic affairs given our status as a sovereign nation." "At official level, the (Fiji-NZ) relationship has remained somewhat strained since 5th December, despite best of efforts on part of Fiji to re-engage with New Zealand. Our High Commissioner in Wellington has continuously been snubbed by the New Zealand Government authorities. The attitude of his counterpart here in Fiji H.E. Mr Green has done little to help the situation." "Government deeply regrets this action, but in the circumstances it has had little choice."

3. (U) The statement ends by insisting that this action should not have any impact on Fiji's relations with other countries. "It is the considered view of Government that this is purely a bilateral matter between Fiji and New Zealand and it in no way should have implications on Fiji's bilateral relations with other countries, including its

commitments and obligations to the International Community as well as the Pacific Island Forum."

Action Against NZ High Commissioner Dominates Fiji Media

14. (SBU) The early afternoon announcement from New Zealand about the IG's decision dominated Fiji's airwaves June 14. Television, radio and websites highlighted New Zealand FM Peters' statement that the government of New Zealand deplores this action by Fiji's interim regime and that there are likely to be serious consequences for all of Fiji's international relationships, including with the Pacific Island nations, Australia, the United States and the EU. Peters said the NZ government would undertake a full review of aspects of its relationship with Fiji, but that it did not plan to PNG Fiji's High Commissioner to New Zealand. All media outlets reported statements by PM Clark that NZ had tried to convince the interim government to "pull back" from this decision over the last several days, to no avail, and that the action was "a giant step backward."

Initial Reaction Harshly Negative

15. (SBU) Comments from non-IG sources in Fiji have been strongly negative so far. Deposed PM Qarase called the decision "immature." Former opposition leader Mick Beddoes said the IG's reasoning for the move, which he interpreted to be Green's extensive contacts with former members of Parliament and opposition figures, was "absurd." "This is definitely not something I would classify as a smart move," he said. The National Federation Party expressed concern about the hardship NZ retaliatory measures could impose on Fiji citizens who regularly travel to, or have relatives in

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New Zealand. He asked the IG to reconsider its stance. Leading activist Shamima Ali, head of the Fiji Women's Crisis Center, said the action reflected the fact that "even diplomats are not at liberty to express an opinion that shows any opposition to the interim regime." It is very unfortunate, she went on, that someone like Green with a deep understanding of Fiji should be asked to leave. She urged the IG to reconsider.

DINGER